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Economic Affairs Interim Committee
62nd Montana Legislature
PO Box 201706
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee,

There have been numerous efforts over the years to accurately assess the physician workforce in Montana. Unfortunately, these efforts have not been successful. As it stands, no one in Montana can say with any certainty the degree to which Montanans have access to qualified doctors. We do not know how many physicians in different specialties are currently practicing in our communities. Without this type of data, we cannot begin to accurately assess needs.

The Legislative Committee of the Montana Medical Association strongly believes that it is not possible to advise the Montana legislature on critical public policy measures regarding Medicaid and other important programs in the absence of an accurate ongoing assessment of the Montana physician workforce. Our Legislative committee has carefully reviewed the possible ways to collect and maintain this data. We believe that the Board of Medical Examiners is the only practical point of contact between physicians and the public to collect this important information. Actively practicing physicians must renew their medical license every two years. As is currently being done in a number of other states, this would be an opportune time to collect relevant individual practice data.

We recommend that the Economic Affairs Interim Committee initiate a bill that would require the Montana Board of Medical Examiners to collect relevant demographic data about the location and scope of services which each licensed physician is currently providing in our State. This data would be collected at the time of initial licensure and at each renewal using a simple questionnaire. We do not anticipate that the Board of Medical Examiners would need to analyze the data in any significant way, but merely make it available. We believe that the MMA and other interested parties could and would analyze the data. Thus, we expect the fiscal note on such a bill would be minimal.

I sincerely hope that the committee will introduce this bill as soon as is practical. This bill will markedly improve our ability to have intelligent informed discussion on the many important health care policy measures which Montana will face in coming years. Thus, I believe that the bill should enjoy strong bi-partisan support. The Montana Medical Association is available to assist in the initial drafting of this simple, yet important bill in any way which would please the Committee.

Sincerely,

Carter E. Beck, M.D.